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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the practical advice for improving parent/teacher communication through written messages and telephone conversations provided in two documents written by Michael L. Henniger of Central Washington University: (1) "Building Parent/Teacher Relations through Written Communication" (ED 211 216); (2) "The Telephone and Parent/Teacher Communication" (ED 211 215). Ideas for written communication include notices, notes, letters, newsletters, pamphlets and brochures. Guidelines for telephone calls include calling at a convenient time, making the initial calls pleasant and positive, and keeping the calls short and to the point. Abstracts of three other ERIC documents on this topic are included. (DC)

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PARENT/TEACHER TALK

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Parent/Teacher Talk

There's never a dull moment in the classroom. Michael, who seldom speaks, shared a funny story about his pet turtle the other day, and Pat has handed in two perfect spelling assignments this week. Christine has managed not to pinch anyone for a whole month!

Sharing daily classroom experiences and future instructional plans with parents is important for teachers dealing with children of all ages. Two ERIC documents by Michael L. Henniger of Central Washington University provide teachers with some useful advice on the best ways to get the message across.

Put It in Writing

A discussion about a topic of perennial interest, Henniger's **Building Parent/Teacher Relations through Written Communication** (ED 211 216, 1977, 11p.) outlines a variety of written communications, describing their most effective use:

- *Notices*, generally no more than a paragraph or two in length, are of interest to all parents. Announcements of an upcoming field trip or the school's holiday program are good examples of this type of message.
- *Notes*, while also very brief, are more personal in nature and generally communicate a single idea. One teacher sent regular notes (which she called "Happy-Grams") to parents, describing a child's positive accomplishments.
- *Letters*, a page or two in length, can address individual parents or be directed toward the group. A letter to an individual parent might describe special activities or assignments to be done at home, while group letters might introduce the teacher, explain goals, or describe curriculum.
- *Newsletters*, issued on a regular basis, can include an array of standing columns — for example, references to articles of interest, messages from the school administration, or a want-ad section for needed classroom materials or volunteers. Stories, artwork, or descriptions of classroom activities contributed by the children themselves can also help to spark parent interest.
- *Pamphlets and brochures* can provide parents with additional information of interest. On subjects such as health and safety or toy selection, for example, these are available from government agencies and private and school organizations, or they may be created by the individual teacher.

A point to remember in communicating with parents, according to the author, is that many adults — both parents and teachers — are more comfortable with a written message than with a face-to-face encounter.

Telephone Talk

As Henniger notes, "Each parent is a unique individual with special needs and preferences. In order to 'reach' each of these individuals, a variety of techniques should be used."

In **The Telephone and Parent/Teacher Communication** (ED 211 215, 1981, 9p.), the author presents 10 guidelines for reaching parents on the telephone, including the following suggestions:

- Be sure that you are calling at a convenient time. If not, agree on another time and make sure to call back then.
- Make your initial telephone contacts pleasant and positive. Doing so will help to allay a parent's inclination to believe that any phone call spells disaster.
- Keep telephone conversations short and to the point — five minutes is often an adequate amount of time.

While the telephone introduces the possibility for immediate, two-way communication (a characteristic distinctly lacking in most written endeavors) some messages may *not* be effectively shared in this way.

Calling to say that some special math problems have been sent home with the child is a message likely to come through clearly to the parent. However, attempting to explain the mathematical concept of regrouping over the lines is probably destined for failure.

If the information to be conveyed is carefully chosen, the telephone — along with such techniques as home visits, parent meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and written messages — can become a most useful tool for sharing the school day with parents, as well as for gaining insight about the children in class.

MORE IN ERIC

Parent Involvement: Teacher Practices and Judgments, by Henry Jay Becker and Joyce L. Epstein. (ED 206 601, 1981, 48p.)

A summary of survey results gives information on techniques to use for involving parents in home learning activities.

Recorded Telephone Messages: A Way to Link Teacher and Parents. Evaluation Report, by Gail Marshall and Herbert Martin. (ED 211 200, 1981, 37p.)

Reports on a project in which third- and fourth-grade teachers taped, for parents, a brief telephone message recapping each week's classroom work on basic skills.

Building Successful Parent-Teacher Partnerships, by Kevin J. Swick and others. (ED 194 180, 1979, 82p. Also available from Humanics, PO Box 7447, Atlanta, GA 30309 — no price quoted.)

Focuses on activities for parents, teachers, and other caregivers which can be used to enhance children's behavior.